

Historical Trends in Georgian Traditional and Sacred Music

Historical Trends in Georgian Traditional and Sacred Music:

*A Tribute to
Anzor Erkomaishvili*

Edited by

Joseph Jordania and
Rusudan Tsurtsumia

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HISTORICAL TRENDS IN GEORGIAN TRADITIONAL AND SACRED MUSIC: A TRIBUTE TO ANZOR ERKOMAISHVILI

JOSEPH JORDANIA AND
RUSUDAN TSURTSUMIA

As it was mentioned in the “Introduction” of the initial collection of the articles “Anzor Erkomaishvili and Contemporary Trends in the Study of Georgian Traditional and Sacred Music”, when we started collecting chapters for the collection, the response both from Georgian and foreign scholars was so overwhelmingly positive, that we decided to prepare two “twin” collections of the articles dedicated to the extraordinary multit talented figure of Anzor Erkomaishvili, Georgian ethnomusicologist, researcher, singer, leader of ensembles Rustavi, teacher, and composer.

This collection that the reader holds in hands, “Historical Trends in Georgian Traditional and Sacred Music: A Tribute to Anzor Erkomaishvili”, is the second of the twin collections dedicated to Anzor Erkomaishvili, containing also twelve chapters. Let us briefly introduce the chapters:

The collection opens with the chapter by Brian Fairley, a PhD student at New York University. “Blackbirds in the Archive: Anzor Erkomaishvili and a Century of Georgian Folk Song” discusses various aspects of Anzor Erkomaishvili’s long and productive work on the search for and revival of archival recording of Georgian traditional music.

The second chapter “Structural Patterns of Georgian Traditional Polyphony” is by Tamaz Gabisonia from Tbilisi Ilia University. The chapter discusses the richness of polyphonic forms of Georgian traditional polyphony.

The author of the third chapter is Marina Kvizhinadze, independent researcher and Georgian ethnomusicologist. The chapter “Family Ensembles in Georgia: Past, Present, and Future” discusses the long and

rich history of family ensembles in Georgia, the real strength behind the splendor of Georgian traditional polyphony.

The fourth chapter is by Baia Zhuzhunadze from Tbilisi State Conservatory. “Musical Processes in the Context of Cultural Interactions (On the Example of Meskheta in the 19th-20th Centuries)” discusses the painful process of the gradual disappearance of the polyphonic tradition in the Meskhetian musical dialect.

The chapter by Nino Razmadze “Georgian Folk Instruments and Instrumental Terminology in Old Georgian Translations of the Bible (9-19 Centuries)” is the only chapter dedicated to Georgian instruments from the historical sources of biblical translations, confirming the thesis of total dominance of vocal music in Georgian traditional and religious music.

The sixth chapter is written by Susanne Ziegler from the Berlin Phonogrammarchiv. “Georgian (Gurian) Polyphony in Historical Perspective” makes an interesting comparative analyses of the same songs from Guria, recorded in the 1930s, and re-recorded in the 1980s.

The seventh chapter has three authors: Gerda Lechneitner, Franz Lechneitner, and Nona Lomidze — all from Vienna Phonogrammarchiv. “CD Project: Recordings from the Caucasian Region 1909 and 1915/16” discusses the earliest recordings of Georgian songs, including precious recordings made during the WWI by prisoners of war.

The author of the eighth chapter, David Shugliashvili, discusses one of the longest-running problem for scholars of Georgian religious music – the neumatic musical signs. In “Multiplicity of the Neumes in the “Tadgari” of Mikael Modrekili”, the iconic manuscript from eleventh century, is analyzed.

The discussion of problems if religious music continues in the next chapter “Mnemonic Formulas – as the Main Organizer of the Musical System in Georgian Chanting Tradition” by Tatia Chkheidze from Tbilisi Conservatory.

The last three chapters discuss the experiences of foreign experts of Georgian music in teaching Georgian music to foreigners: Polo Vallejo with the tenth chapter of the collection, “Refining Western Polyphonic Ear through Georgian Harmonies Teaching Experiences Based on the Georgian Musical Grammar,” then Frank Kane from Paris Marani Georgian

association continues with the chapter “The Challenge of Understanding and Transmitting the Essence of Georgian Singing: Experiences in Vocal Pedagogy,” where he discusses the new methodological tools for better and deeper understanding the inner world of Georgian traditional polyphony.

And finally, the last chapter, written by Caroline Bithell from Manchester University, “Performing Georgia in Distant Lands: Georgian Song and its Foreign Exponents,” is a sweeping picture of foreign ensembles and their unique ways of getting in touch with Georgian singing.

* * * * *

In order to have an idea of the contents of the both collections here is list of the authors and the brief introduction of the chapters of the first collection, “Anzor Erkomaishvili and Current Trends in the Study of Georgian Traditional and Sacred Music”:

The first chapter is written by a Russian/American scholar Izaly Zemtsovsky. Dedicated to Anzor Erkomaishvili, the chapter “Polyphony as a Way of Creating and Thinking: The musical Identity of HOMO POLYPHONICUS” is a fascinating portrait of the creative thinking of representatives of polyphonic cultures.

The second chapter, by Stuart Gelzer, an American professional writer and singer, member of the trio Kavkasia, arguably the most proficient foreign ensemble of Georgian music, “How to Learn a Georgian Song by Ear,” is a vividly written description of the process of learning a complex Georgian song from Anzor Erkomaishvili by the American/Canadian trio Kavkasia. Anzor did so much during his life, sometimes people would ask, “Well, was he at least sick some time?” This chapter answers exactly this question – what Anzor Erkomaishvili was doing when he was sick.

The third chapter belongs to Rusudan Tsurtsumia, the Director of the International Research Centre for Traditional Polyphony. “Georgian Polyphony as Symbol of the National Identity of the Multicultural Society” provides a bird’s-eye view of Georgian history and national identity through the turbulent periods of Georgian cultural and ethnic history.

The fourths chapter is by an international group of scholars, including Frank Scherbaum from the University of Potsdam, Germany, Nana Mzhavanadze from Tbilisi Conservatory, Simha Arom from CNRS Paris, France, and Sebastian Rosenzweig and Meinard Müller from International

Audio Laboratories, Erlangen, Germany. They researched the musical language of Georgian traditional music using the contemporary methods of computational ethnomusicology in the chapter "Tonal Organization of the Erkomaishvili Dataset: Pitches, Scales, Melodies and Harmonies."

The fifth chapter is by Nino Tsitsishvili, an Australian/Georgian ethnomusicologist from the University of Melbourne. The chapter "'Mival Guriashi, Mara:' Improvisation Techniques in Gurian Polyphonic Songs" discusses the hidden mastery of improvising in the Gurian tradition using the example of several versions of a single song performed by two grandmasters of Gurian singing, Vazha Gogoladze and Anzor Erkomaishvili.

In the sixth chapter "Continuing Discussions on Scale Systems in Georgian Traditional and Religious Music" Australian/Georgian ethnomusicologist Joseph Jordania attempts to discuss the long-running and still hot discussion on the nature of Georgian traditional scales with its achievements and pitfalls.

The seventh chapter is written by Giorgi Kraveishvili from Tbilisi State Conservatory, probably the most active Georgian ethnomusicologist today with field work in various regions of Georgia and outside of Georgia. He discusses the sensational discovery of a hitherto unknown Georgian polyphonic style in a chapter titled "Discovery of a New Georgian Polyphonic Style."

The eighth chapter was written by two authors, ethnomusicologist Nana Mzhavanadze and traditional singer Madonna Chamgeliani. The chapter "The Role of Women in the Musical Life of the Svan People" discusses the unusually important role of female singers play in Svan traditional society.

The ninth chapter, "Stage Performance of Women's Folk Music in Georgia", was written by Maka Khardziani from Tbilisi State Conservatory. The chapter discusses another relatively neglected area of females singing Georgian traditional music on the official stage.

The tenth chapter "Temporal Distortions, Timelessness, and Ancestry in Georgian Polyphony" is by Canadian/Ukrainian ethnomusicologist Andrea Kuzmich. The chapter brings interesting new dimensions from the listening experiences of various ancient musical traditions.

The eleventh chapter “Folk Polyphony Goes Viral: Televised Singing Competitions and the Play of Authenticity in the Republic of Georgia” was written by Canadian ethnomusicologist Matthew Knight. The chapter discusses three case studies in which folk polyphonic songs were performed in TV competitions like *Georgian Idol*, *Georgia's Got Talent*, and *Eurovision*.

And the last, twelfth chapter of the first collection was written by Teona Lomsadze from Tbilisi State Conservatory. “Folk-Fusion Music as a Contemporary Product of the Georgian Traditional Music Revival” is the only chapter that discusses the creative transformation of Georgian traditional and religious musical traditions in contemporary popular musical genres.

* * * * *

We are sure that this twin collection dedicated to both historical and contemporary trends in the research of Georgian traditional songs and church songs, united under the remarkable figure of Anzor Erkomaishvili, will delight the professional ethnomusicologists, singers, and lay people who love this vibrant polyphonic culture.

CHAPTER ONE

BLACKBIRDS IN THE ARCHIVE: ANZOR ERKOMAISHVILI AND A CENTURY OF GEORGIAN FOLK SONG

BRIAN FAIRLEY¹

On 19 February 2009 Anzor Erkomaishvili stood onstage in the Grand Hall of the Tbilisi State Conservatoire to introduce a performance by the Georgian folk ensemble Basiani.² His brief remarks offered some context

¹ PhD student in ethnomusicology at New York University

² This chapter was first published under the title “Blackbirds in the Archive: Genealogy and Media in a Century of Georgian Folk Song,” in *Ethnomusicology* 64 (2), 274–300. I thank the Society for Ethnomusicology for permission to reprint. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Conference on the Music of South, Central, and West Asia at Harvard University, March 4, 2016, and at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology in Denver, Colorado, October 29, 2017. I was especially grateful for the opportunity to present this work at a symposium organized by Marina Kaganova, “The Discourse of Authenticity in Georgian Folk Music,” at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University, on January 25, 2017. My copanelists at this event, Caroline Bithell, Carl Linich, and Lauren Ninoshvili, offered encouraging and helpful responses. I thank Lauren Ninoshvili, J. Martin Daughtry, Brigid Cohen, Peter McMurray, and Mark Slobin for their keen readings of this article in draft and Eric Charry, Su Zheng, John Graham, and Ronald Kuivila for shepherding this writing through earlier incarnations. Fieldwork was undertaken with funding from Wesleyan University during my master’s degree research. John Graham and Ekaterina Kantaria assisted with translation of my ethnographic interviews, David Shugliashvili provided crucial assistance with images and other research questions, and Ekaterina Diasamidze made the Georgian translation of this article’s abstract. I wish to thank my interlocutors, Carl Linich, Zurab Tskrialashvili, and Ilia Jgarkava, for opening the doors to this work with generosity and patience, and above all I thank Anzor Erkomaishvili, without whom Georgian music would not be what it is today. I deeply regret that our dialogue,

for the piece about to be sung: “Our work songs [*naduri*] have a very long and extensive history. We could call them a unique phenomenon in the world.” He then announced that Basiani “will now perform for us the exact same variant [of this *naduri*] that Gigo Erkomaishvili’s group recorded in 1907.”³ Though not explicitly stated here, Anzor Erkomaishvili’s relationship to Gigo Erkomaishvili would have been well known to those in the audience: Anzor is the great-grandson of Gigo, a master singer and choir leader from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ Anzor’s own credentials would also have been well known to the audience. As founder and director of the Rustavi Ensemble, Anzor has arguably done more than any other individual to popularize traditional Georgian music at home and abroad. He also successfully lobbied for Georgian polyphonic singing’s recognition as a UNESCO-proclaimed masterpiece of intangible cultural heritage (Tsitsishvili, 2009).

Anzor is famous in Georgia as a performer and public intellectual, yet his appearance in the Grand Hall with Basiani pointed to another of his roles: keeper of the archive of Georgian music, presenting and restoring forgotten treasures from over a century of audio recording. The concert, in fact, was held to celebrate the recent publication of a book and CD of archival recordings (Erkomaishvili & Rodonaia, 2006). The performance by Basiani that immediately followed his speech quoted above—a virtuosic re-creation of the “*Sajavakhura naduri*” recorded by Gigo Erkomaishvili’s group in 1907—is emblematic of his multifaceted legacy. The group’s professional concert presentation owes much to the model of Anzor’s Rustavi Ensemble, which has captivated audiences around the world since the 1960s, although aspects of Basiani’s repertoire and performance style—their vocal timbre especially—represent a break with Rustavi’s so-called academic style.

“*Sajavakhura naduri*,” the piece performed onstage, is an agricultural work song from western Georgia that is named for the village of Sajavakho.

which began so promisingly in the research for this piece, was cut off so abruptly by his untimely passing.

³ Transcription from performance video (<https://youtu.be/0O89ChVAk4s>): ჩვენს ნადურს ძალიან გრძელი, ვრცელი ისტორია აქვს და იგი შეიძლება ჩავთვალოთ მსოფლიოში უნიკალურ მოვლენად. ეხლა „ბასიანი“ შეასრულებს სწორედ იმ ვარიანტს, რომელიც გიგო ერქომაიშვილის გუნდმა ჩაწერა 1907 წელს.

⁴ Because many of the figures I discuss have the same surname, I use given names to refer to members of the Erkomaishvili family.

It is sung antiphonally by an all-male, unaccompanied vocal ensemble. Basiani's performance begins with a solo call, quickly answered by another singer with a twisting, descending line. Typical of songs from western Georgia, the text of this piece largely consists of "nonsense" syllables like *wo* and *de la da*, resonant vocables lacking lexical significance but harboring expressive power (see Ninoshvili, 2010; Tuite, 2015). The song takes time to build up, with two groups trading long phrases back and forth while the lower voices sustain single-pitch drones. Gradually, the tempo picks up and the rhythm becomes sharper as solo voices in each group execute dense passages of three-part counterpoint. Now new sonic elements emerge: vocal techniques like *gamqivani*, named for a rooster's crowing (*qivili*), and *k'rimanch'uli*, a high-pitched yodeling ostinato. As the antiphonal exchanges become shorter and shorter, Basiani's yodelers maintain their stamina and brilliance. One could imagine two teams of farmhands who begin several miles apart and ruthlessly scythe the fields between them until only a few yards remain. In a kind of *stretto*, the groups trade phrases of eight beats, then four, then two, until the tension cannot be sustained any longer, and all the voices resolve in a ringing unison.⁵ These work songs are among the longest, most challenging pieces in any ensemble's repertoire. Even more remarkable, then, is Basiani's achievement in matching, note for note, a performance recorded a hundred years before.

In this article, I present a media archaeology of three moments in Georgian traditional music history. Two of them occupy the bulk of my analysis, operating in intimate dialogue a century apart: the 2009 performance by Basiani and the 1907 gramophone recording by Gigo Erkomaishvili on which it is based. As an epilogue, I recount a third instance of significant media practice chronologically halfway between the other two: the 1966 tape recordings of Artem Erkomaishvili, the last master chanter in the Georgian Orthodox Church tradition. These moments are most obviously linked by the presence of three generations of the same family—Gigo (1840–1947), Gigo's son Artem (1887–1967), and Artem's grandson Anzor (1940–2021)—yet they do more than tell a family story (see figure 1). Here, family genealogy becomes media history, and decades of performance practice hinge on the archival efforts of one man seeking to hear the voices of his forebears.

⁵ A short film from 1958 by Otar Chiaureli based on the work of musicologist Vladimer Akhobadze featured a staged *naduri* in a cornfield with superimposed images of musical notation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlhHIV2murM>).

By identifying my method as “media archaeology,” I engage with a heterogeneous set of practices cutting across disciplines from comparative literature to science and technology studies. What unites these practices is a commitment to writing histories of culture and technology that are antiteleological and resist master narratives of progress and innovation. General introductions to media archaeology (Parikka, 2012; Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011) identify such precursors as Walter Benjamin, Aby Warburg, and Marshall McLuhan while emphasizing the influence of Michel Foucault, especially *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). An oft-cited figure is the literary theorist Friedrich Kittler (1990), who never identified his work as media archaeology yet who argued that literary history must take account of the “discourse networks” (*Aufschreibesysteme*) that encode and store cultural data in material form, be it writing, sound recording, or digital media.



Figure 1. Front row, from left: Gigo, Artem, and Davit Erkomaishvili (Anzor's father), in 1934. Photo courtesy of Anzor Erkomaishvili.

Although cinema and visual culture have tended to dominate in histories of media, technologies of sound recording and reproduction have been rich resources for media archaeology (Kittler, 1999; Gitelman, 1999, 2008;

Sterne, 2003; Thompson, 2004; Mills, 2012). Within musicology, Gavin Williams (2011), Andrea Bohlman (2016), and Roger Moseley (2016) make explicit use of the term “media archaeology” and its attendant methodologies (cf. Rehding, 2017), as does a special issue of *Twentieth-Century Music* (Bohlman & McMurray, 2017) dedicated to sound on tape. While ethnomusicologists have long been attentive to technologies of sound recording and the social structures they entail (Manuel, 1993; Meintjes, 2003; Greene & Porcello, 2005), applications of media archaeology discourse to ethnomusicology are still rare. Notably, Peter McMurray’s (2019) media-archaeological work on the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature—and the afterlife of its media artifacts—shares with this article an ethnographic attention to the family genealogies that become bound up in an archive and entangled with the politics of repatriation and redistribution. Above all, what I draw from media archaeology is a way of writing history that recognizes the enduring significance of different periods and artifacts of media practice, offering insights into the lives of users liberated and constrained by those technologies.

The media archaeologist “sees media cultures as sedimented and layered, a fold of time and materiality where the past might be suddenly discovered anew” (Parikka, 2012: 3). The archival recordings of Georgian folk and sacred music that I examine here enact such a fold. They have influenced performing groups from the 1980s onward and provoked renewed interest in the pre-Soviet soundscape of Georgian culture. In the process, accidents and idiosyncrasies—even, as I argue below, *mistakes* on these source recordings—became canonic, repeated features of live performance. While my attention to such “noisy” elements is firmly in line with leading currents of media archaeology, especially the work of Wolfgang Ernst (2013), I also address a gap in much media theory by incorporating ethnography based on my ongoing fieldwork in Georgia, which entails a greater awareness of live performance contexts and embodied vocal practices. In this way, my method here resonates with more recent trends in German media theory, particularly the “cultural techniques” (*Kulturtechnik*) approach, which attempts to assimilate bodily techniques into general theories of technology, restoring agency to human actors while acknowledging the constraints imposed by media systems (Sieger, 2008; Geoghegan, 2013).

My focus in this article on Anzor Erkomaishvili further underscores the need for a multifaceted approach to media and memory, since Anzor has shaped the performance of Georgian music not only as a highly respected singer, teacher, and transmitter of an oral tradition but also as a master

operator within networks of media creation and dissemination. Accordingly, I draw on Jacques Derrida's (1996) theorization of the archive to render legible Anzor's outsize influence, cultivated over a half-century career. Attention to dominant figures like Anzor, I suggest, is crucial in any history of traditional music in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, offering an alternative to impersonal or reductive theories of autonomous stylistic change or the one-way influence of Western paradigms of modernity.

Readers may recognize counterparts from other traditions. Taking, for example, the case of Irish music in the twentieth century, one could point to Seán Ó Riada as the most important person in establishing and policing the canonical practices of Irish traditional music (Williams & Ó Laoire, 2011: 30–35). At the same time, media artifacts played a vital role in this same revival, notably the records made in the 1920s and 1930s by the fiddler Michael Coleman, which helped establish fiddle playing from the Sligo region as the dominant national style. What sets Anzor apart, I argue, is his unique position as both an arbiter of cultural practice on a national scale, like Ó Riada, and a direct claimant, through family connection, to the authority of the earliest sound documents. In keeping this history focused on the individual, I also recognize that, for Anzor, the quest to restore to life the voices of the past is always colored by a mournful sense of familial and cultural loss.

Tracing the arc of Anzor's career will help elucidate the path to Basiani's 2009 performance, with its note-for-note imitation of the 1907 recording. This path primarily involves changes in performance practice by Georgian ensembles beginning in the 1960s. I argue that a clear dichotomy between "academic" and "neotraditional" styles, a commonplace among scholars and practitioners (Graham, 2015: 477), obscures a more complex interplay of varying and complementary claims on authenticity. Historical recordings—and the different uses to which they are put by different singers—cast these claims in high relief. In the case of Basiani's performance of "Sajavakhura naduri," I identify four different conceptions of authenticity at work: the *testimonial* authority of the 1907 recording itself; the *genealogical* legitimacy of the archivist, Anzor, whose great-grandfather sings on that record; an *iconic* authenticity in Basiani's painstaking imitation of the original recording's sounds and vocal timbres; and, finally, a kind of *existential* authenticity, expressed in the notion of "singing with your own voice" that Anzor described to me in an interview.

Given that the very notion of authenticity, a foundational concern in folklore and ethnomusicology, is justly open for deconstruction (Bendix, 1997), it is not my purpose to evaluate or weigh these claims against each other. Even so, ideas of authenticity may constitute “the very core around which people build meaningful lives” (17). This is especially true for professional folk singers, for whom being seen as authentic or not has serious economic consequences (see Witulski, 2018 on “negotiated authenticity”). In order, then, to see how this discourse of authenticity developed, we must turn first to the earliest sound documents and the cultural technology involved in their production.

1. The gramophone in prerevolutionary Georgia

In the early years of the twentieth century, the Russian Empire was a growing market for new record companies. Among the first to set up in Russia was the Gramophone Company, a London-based multinational corporation that had licensed the patent for Emile Berliner’s disc-playing gramophone in 1898 (Jones, 1985: 80). An alliance between the Gramophone Company and the US-based Victor Talking Machine Company divided the world into noncompeting hemispheres, with the Gramophone Company operating in Europe, the British Empire (including India and much of Africa), the Russian Empire, and Japan. Between 1898 and 1921, the Gramophone Company produced two hundred thousand different recordings (Gronow & Saunio, 1998: 12). Two brothers, Frederick and William Gaisberg, were the most renowned of the company’s pioneering record producers, making the voice of Enrico Caruso familiar throughout the world. While opera and Western classical music would remain the centerpiece of record catalogs for decades, these producers quickly recognized the value of capturing local genres on disc, especially as they pursued new markets outside the capital cities. “When the musical centers of Europe had been exhausted, the Gaisbergs were sent to more exotic places” (p. 11).

In Fred Gaisberg’s own words (1942: 26), Russia was “that El Dorado of traders,” and for the Gramophone Company, the economic promise of the Russian market was no myth. By the outbreak of the First World War, 22 percent of the company’s business came from Russia (Jones, 1985: 89). The branch office in Tbilisi, then known as Tiflis and capital of Russia’s Caucasus Viceroyalty, was responsible for recording a wide range of ethnic and linguistic groups in the North and South Caucasus. Music from Central Asia and Iran was also handled by the Tiflis office (Gronow, 1981: 256).

From 1901 to 1914, approximately 170 Gramophone Company records featured Georgian folk music in the polyphonic vocal tradition (Erkomaishvili & Rodonaia, 2006), including forty-nine by Gigo Erkomaishvili's choir, who made the trip in spring 1907 to the studio on Golovinsky Prospect (today Rustaveli Avenue). No recordings were made in Georgia between 1903 and 1907, perhaps owing to political instability related to the 1905 Russian Revolution, in which Gigo's home region of Guria played a significant role (Villari, 1906; Jones, 2005).

Exact sales numbers are hard to come by, though anecdotes attest to the ubiquity of gramophones on the outskirts of Russia. As one early engineer put it in an article for the *Talking Machine World*: "In the Caucasus mountains the talker can be heard in every one of the multitudinous villages; the records are played unceasingly and are therefore soon worn out, causing a result which is not particularly pleasing to [anyone] other than the Cossacks themselves who will never buy another record of the same title until one is actually broken. Even then they retain the pieces and in some cases decorate their huts with them"⁶ (Noble, 1913: 65). This engineer's account—which elsewhere narrates a robbery at the hands of brigands and a daring mountain escape—must be approached cautiously, as it clearly partakes in exoticizing stereotypes and tropes of adventure writing. Even so, this description inadvertently hits on two notable features of listening in these preradio, pre-mass-media days—namely, the wide availability of recordings and playback machines and the "intensive" listening practices (Gitelman, 2008: 63) that transform a record through overplaying into shiny, decorative material.

In similar terms, Anzor Erkomaishvili, who was born in 1940, explained to me that in the days before radio came to Makvaneti, the village in Guria where he grew up, "every single family in town" owned some records (interview, 30 August 2016). If they did not have a record player themselves, they would go to listen at the home of someone who did. Although the 1907 recordings of Gigo Erkomaishvili predate Anzor's memory by some four decades, we may still situate them within a social context rapidly coming to terms with mediated sound. In later years, these early sound documents would gain status as authentic testimonials to a pre-Soviet musical practice as yet unsullied by commercial or political interference. Rather than view Gigo and his fellow singers, however, as

⁶ Noble's reference to these people as "Cossacks" is likely a generic term for villagers of the Caucasus, who elsewhere are identified more specifically as Ingush or Chechen, if not explicitly Georgian.

naive premoderns, captured on disc by happy chance, I suggest we recognize their agency in the media processes that preserve their voices. Why, then, did Gigo want his choir recorded? In Anzor's telling, it was a friend who encouraged Gigo and bankrolled the recording session (interview, 30 August 2016). Beyond that, we must look to broader cultural trends for contextual clues.

"Russian record manufacturers," Anna Fishzon writes in her study of early twentieth-century opera recordings, "sold the notion that consumers acquired sophistication and status through the purchase of native 'greatness'—the experience of beautiful voices and exemplary personalities in their own language" (2011: 807). While opera stars from France or Italy might sing and record Tchaikovsky in translation, by 1902 Russian singers like Fyodor Chaliapin had filled the market with arias and art songs in Russian. In Georgia, on the fringes of the empire, the desire for an audible "native greatness" embraced not only Georgian opera singers like Ia Kargareteli and Vano Sarajishvili but also folk choirs like Gigo Erkomaishvili's. Here the market principles of supply and demand dovetailed with political currents, for, beginning in the late nineteenth century, choirs dedicated to Georgia's indigenous music traditions had helped to amplify the Georgian nationalist movement, encouraged by writers like Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli (Suny, 1994: 133). Gigo, in other words, was part of a broader social movement, and through a mechanism parallel to the one Fishzon describes for opera singers, his choir's sound recordings offered a visceral experience of authenticity.

The 1907 gramophone recordings were made at an inflection point in the history of Georgian national identity, in the immediate aftermath of revolts connected to the 1905 Russian Revolution and a decade before the short-lived Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918–21) seemed to offer a culmination of the Georgian independence movement.⁷ Likewise, the rediscovery and restoration of these recordings, which I discuss in the next section, took place in the waning years of the Soviet Union and the first decades of Georgia's post-Soviet sovereignty. Whatever significance the recordings possessed for their original audiences would be transformed and enhanced in the folk revival that began to take hold in the 1970s.

⁷ A more robust understanding of early twentieth-century Georgian aurality would necessarily build on the work of Lauren Ninoshvili (2011), which juxtaposes early folkloric investigations into Georgian vocal music with contemporaneous sonic experimentation by literary modernists.

2. The records recirculate

Anzor Erkomaishvili has told the story of his rediscovery of these Gramophone Company recordings many times, whether in published accounts or in interviews for television. The most detailed narrative of his search for old records was written in 1980 and published as a chapter of his first memoir, later translated into English as “Tracing Old Phonorecords” (Erkomaishvili, 1988, 2007a). In the essay, Anzor narrates an odyssey that, beginning in the early 1970s, took him through a bewildering maze of Soviet bureaucracy, with stops at archives in Leningrad, Kiev, Riga, and Krasnogorsk. He struck gold, so to speak, at the Central State Archive of Sound Recordings in Moscow, where he found copper or brass matrices of many of the Gramophone Company recordings from which new nickel discs could be pressed and played back. By cross-checking with published catalogs—or, in some cases, by recognizing the song on an unlabeled matrix as one he had a copy of at home—Anzor was able to identify the repertoire and performers on a majority of the discs. As founder and director of the internationally renowned Rustavi Ensemble, Anzor had access to these archives and could leverage his relationship with Melodiya, the Soviet state-controlled record company, to fund the restoration of the matrices, the pressing of new discs, and their conversion to tape. In the late 1980s, Melodiya began releasing these recordings on LP, with several discs dedicated to specific singers (including recordings from the 1930s and later), as well as a five-LP set specifically devoted to the Gramophone Company records (Ziegler, 1989; see the discography).

Anzor made further discoveries in 1991 at the British Institute of Recorded Sound, but these records would have to wait nearly a decade to be heard by the public. The 1990s were a period of intense political and economic instability in Georgia, with the breakup of the Soviet Union, constitutional crises, and separatist conflicts all taking their toll. Plans to release the Gramophone Company recordings on CD were abandoned during this time, and besides, Melodiya, which had released all of Anzor’s music, had functionally ceased to exist.⁸ According to Carl Linich, a longtime student and friend of Anzor, the records had been transferred to DAT tapes yet were simply “sitting in a box on a shelf in [ethnomusicologist Ted Levin’s] office” (interview, 17 October 2015). As a teacher and

⁸ The demise of Melodiya is a source of frustration to Anzor still. He does not retain the rights to any of his Soviet-era records—whether Rustavi albums or his archival releases—and bristles when he hears about reissues by unknown companies or high-priced resales on sites like Ebay.

performer, Carl Linich has been a major figure in the spread of Georgian folk singing to North America (Bithell, 2014), and his archival work has been equally significant. At Levin's prompting, Linich took on the task of "doing something" with the recordings. Making a selection of twenty-five songs, Linich produced *Drinking Horns & Gramophones*, a CD released by Traditional Crossroads in 2001.

The success of *Drinking Horns & Gramophones* was followed by a four-CD release of all extant Gramophone Company recordings in the form of a deluxe, coffee-table-style book with extensive notes in English and Georgian titled *Georgian Folk Song: The First Sound Recordings, 1901–1914* (Erkomaishvili & Rodonaia, 2006). This project rode the wave of international recognition following the 2001 UNESCO proclamation of Georgian polyphonic singing as a "masterpiece of the oral and intangible cultural heritage of humanity."⁹ New publications and recordings appeared—funded by various governmental and international entities—and new folk music ensembles were established within Georgia (Bithell, 2014: 581). Anzor's historical-recordings project thus played directly into a global preservationist narrative with elements of repatriation and transnational collaboration. The book and CDs were funded in part by the United States Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, and it was at a celebration for the book's publication that Anzor delivered the speech quoted at the beginning of this article.

3. Keeper of the archive

Despite this inspiring narrative of rediscovery and restoration, for Anzor the recordings were never really lost. In several cases, the best-preserved copy of a Gramophone Company disc came not from a state or corporate archive but rather from his personal collection (Erkomaishvili, 2007a: 31). The Erkomaishvili family, it seems, were early adopters of recording technology. In an essay about Gigo, Anzor recalls meeting his great-grandfather sometime in the mid-1940s, when Anzor was a young boy and Gigo over a hundred years old. On this occasion, Gigo's son Artem brought his father some records as a gift, and the old man took out his gramophone to have a listen. The young Anzor was fascinated by the brown box and assumed there must be a small, sound-making demon inside (Erkomaishvili,

⁹ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/georgian-polyphonic-singing-00008>.

2006: 12).¹⁰ This same gramophone remains in the family in working condition, and when I visited Anzor in 2016, he readily offered to play one of the original Gramophone Company discs for me. The upper floor of Anzor's apartment in Tbilisi is wholly dedicated to photographs, musical instruments, and other treasures from his years as a performer and scholar of Georgian music, an archive at once deeply personal and broad in scope.¹¹

The question of the archive, according to Jacques Derrida, is one of outside and inside, specifically, "Where does the outside commence?" (1996: 8). For Anzor, the master archivist, this question pertains to the boundary between family genealogy and the history of Georgian music more generally. Gigo Erkomaishvili's date of birth is generally given as 1839 or 1840, and Gigo himself traced his singing lineage back several generations. Thus two centuries of singing expertise lead up to Anzor. The Erkomaishvili family hails from Guria, a region of western Georgia bordering the Black Sea. Although the administrative unit called Guria today is the smallest in Georgia (apart from the capital district around Tbilisi), its musical traditions dominate the archive. Of the ninety-nine surviving Gramophone Company recordings, forty-four of them feature Gurian singers and repertoire. The other significant corpus of early Georgian recordings, those made in German and Austrian prisoner-of-war camps during World War I, likewise features the voices of many Gurians, one of whom served as a chief informant for the comparative musicologist Robert Lach (1928: 7).

Guria's prominence in Georgian music history is further augmented by the importance of the Shemokmedi monastery. At Shemokmedi, near the Gurian capital of Ozurgeti, an oral tradition of church chanting was maintained into the twentieth century, longer than any other center of chant. When scholars and composers in the late nineteenth century began to study and transcribe Georgian church chant—which, like the secular repertoire, is also unaccompanied vocal polyphony in three parts—they gave

¹⁰ Erkki Huhtamo identifies the conceit that "little people" (or fairies or demons) are responsible for the sound of a gramophone as one of media archaeology's foundational *topoi*, stereotypical formulas or clichés that "accompany and influence the development of media culture" and "mold the meaning(s) of cultural objects" (2011: 27–28).

¹¹ Michael Heller's *Loft Jazz* (2017: 145–78) features an illuminating ethnography of percussionist Juma Sultan's private archive, highlighting the role such archives can play in processes of self-definition, especially for marginalized genres and performers.

Shemokmedi special attention (Graham, 2015). As I discuss in this article's epilogue, Artem Erkomaishvili, Gigo's son and Anzor's grandfather, was the last representative of the "Shemokmedi school" and made important recordings in 1966, when Anzor was still a young man.

Taking all of this into account, it is safe to say that Erkomaishvili would have been an important name in Georgian music history, even without the international fame of Anzor's Rustavi Ensemble. Nevertheless, Anzor, throughout his celebrated career, has used multiple strategies of inscription to shape public understandings of Georgian traditional music and its history. In this way, he embodies what Derrida (1996: 22) terms the "archontic dimension" of the archive, an idea linked to the duality at the heart of the word's Greek etymology. *Arkhe* can mean both "origin" and "rule": thus Derrida's pithy formulation, "the *commencement* and the *commandment*" (p. 1). The *arkheion*, in ancient Greece, was both the house of the rulers and a repository for the documents that historicized and legitimized their rule. There is always a person or group that maintains a privileged relation to the messages contained in an archive's documents and can therefore control their circulation. Anzor's privileged position may originate with his name and his early training in Gurian folk singing, yet it finds constant reinforcement in the different ways he writes himself and his family into the canonical history of Georgian music.

The concepts of "canon" and "archive," central to this story, may be seen as two modalities of cultural memory. Thus the literary theorist Aleida Assmann (2010) distinguishes between active and passive remembering (canon and archive, respectively), drawing an analogy to an individual's "working memory" or "reference memory." In her terms, cultural messages and traces in a society's canon are readily available to all members of that society, while similar items in a society's archive require special effort to access. Assmann's framework, which also describes active and passive *forgetting* (when knowledge is either lost by a society or deliberately erased), is most helpful in tracking the movement of objects, materials, processes, or technologies from canonical circulation to archival stasis and back again. "The two realms of cultural memory," Assmann writes, "are not sealed against each other." Rather, elements of the canon can "recede into the archive, while elements of the archive may be recovered and reclaimed for the canon" (p. 104).

The process of canon formation has long been of interest to musicologists and ethnomusicologists (Bergeron & Bohlman, 1992), particularly the way that canonized repertoires and practices exert a kind of

coercive force on musicians. Sound recordings play a complex role here, sometimes elevated to canonical status themselves (this is especially common in jazz), sometimes relegated to an archive, their secrets and idiosyncrasies waiting to be discovered and perhaps incorporated into future canons.

For decades, the canon of Georgian folk song was more or less synonymous with the recorded output of the Rustavi Ensemble. Founded in 1968 by graduates of the state conservatory of music in Tbilisi and led from its inception by Anzor Erkomaishvili, Rustavi appeared on no fewer than thirty LPs put out by Melodiya. Two of these albums, in their comprehensive scope, represent quintessential moves of canon formation: *Sixty Georgian Folk Songs*, released in 1981, and *One Hundred Georgian Folk Songs*, a massive eight-disc set released in 1989 (see the discography). No other ensemble attempted so complete a recording project, dedicated to representing Georgia's different regional repertoires. In the grooves of these records, Anzor and his collaborators inscribed a vision of Georgian folk music as a monumental cultural achievement on par with traditions of art music throughout the world.

Anzor's practices of inscription, however, entail both erasure and preservation. The selection of material that he and Carl Linich included in their Gramophone Company releases paints a picture of Georgian music making in the early twentieth century that is only a narrow slice of the archival record. *Before the Revolution* (2002), a CD compiled by Will Prentice, a sound preservationist at the British Library, also consists of pre-1917 Gramophone Company recordings and clearly demonstrates the mingling of languages and ethnicities in the regions that would become independent Georgia. The city of Tbilisi, in particular, harbored a number of urban musical styles showing Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Persian influence, and several artists recorded in multiple languages and musical styles (Ziegler, 1997). As Prentice (2002) observes, such "ambiguities of cultural identity" would seem "awkward" today in the post-Soviet Caucasus.¹² Anzor's focus on Georgian vocal music "in the polyphonic tradition" ends up excluding solo songs, instrumental music, and "city songs" featuring guitar or piano accompaniment, not to mention musical traditions of the other linguistic and ethnic groups that have lived in Tbilisi

¹² Prentice and Erkomaishvili's differing archival projects should not be seen as antagonistic, however: Prentice himself has declared his admiration for Anzor's work, and Anzor's writings discuss many discs that do not appear on his reissue CDs (Erkomaishvili, 2007a).

for centuries.¹³ This is a kind of “epistemology of purification” (Ochoa Gautier, 2006) that reinforces the brand of ethnonationalist narratives advanced by Georgian politicians since 1991.

More space would be needed for a full account of Anzor Erkomaishvili’s dominant role in Georgian musical life, which extends to radio, film, and publishing.¹⁴ His organization, the International Centre for Georgian Folk Song, has published many books and musical scores, including a biographical volume dedicated to the Erkomaishvili family (Chokhonelidze & Rodonaia, 2004), as well as a book of scores based on Artem’s song and chant repertoire (Erkomaishvili, 2005). Taken together, Anzor’s efforts in a wide range of media to identify, classify, unify, and disseminate Georgia’s rich musical traditions represent what Derrida calls the power of “consignation,” or the “gathering together [of] signs” (1996: 3). In this framework, a keeper of the archive like Anzor Erkomaishvili “aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (p. 3).

4. Voices of revival

The “ideal configuration” of the Georgian folk tradition, of course, involves more than texts and objects in a physical archive. It is a dynamic entity continually reenacted by living singers and dependent on embodied practices of the voice. What is perhaps most remarkable about the performance by Basiani that sparked this research is not how much their voices sound like the 1907 gramophone recording but rather how *little* they sound like the Rustavi Ensemble, a much more recent performance model. The recirculation of archival recordings must be counted as a major force in the transformation of vocal production and timbre by Georgian groups from the 1960s to today. As a result of these changes, the blended, balanced vocal style perfected by Rustavi is no longer the dominant practice, at least among professional folk groups in Tbilisi. Thus I argue that one effect of Anzor Erkomaishvili’s archival efforts is a kind of genealogical slippage: thanks to technological mediation, singers in the post-Soviet generation,

¹³ The *duduk* ensembles in Tbilisi represent such a tradition, which is generally excluded from Georgian folkloric categories owing to its connection to Armenian and Near Eastern musical styles. An ethnographic film by Hugo Zemp and Nino Tsitsishvili (2012) and ongoing scholarship by Tsitsishvili (2007; Helbig et al., 2008) may be seen as restorative moves in this regard.

¹⁴ See Fairley (2017) for further discussion of Anzor’s work as a publisher, impresario, and anonymous folk-music composer.

rather than following in Anzor's footsteps, can choose instead to be pupils of his great-grandfather Gigo.

Understanding the Georgian folk music revival demands a brief history of Georgian choral performance practice (Bithell, 2014), beginning with the 1885 founding of the Kartuli Khoro. This was the first professional choir dedicated to Georgian folk music, and it was formed as part of the nineteenth-century nationalist revival movement. As a result of this choir's popular concert tours, "singing groups sprouted like mushrooms throughout Georgia" (Shilakadze, 1961: 10). Gigo Erkomaishvili's choir was one such group. Although Gigo's ensemble did not do this, many choirs of the time, imitating the Kartuli Khoro, added additional singers to the upper two voice parts, traditionally sung solo, and tuned their singing to equal-tempered thirds, abandoning indigenous Georgian tuning (Arakishvili, 1925: 45, cited in Shilakadze, 1961: 9). After 1917, large choirs became the norm throughout the Soviet Union, whether in the form of professional folklore groups or amateur "people's choirs" assembled for regional festivals called Olympiads (LaPasha, 2004). It was on the Russian model of the Piatnitskii Choir and the Moiseyev Dance Ensemble that the Georgian State Ensemble of Song and Dance was formed in 1936 (Bithell, 2014: 579; cf. Smith, 2002; Shay, 2016).¹⁵

Members of the Rustavi Ensemble, like Anzor Erkomaishvili, were students during the post-Stalin cultural thaw of the late 1950s and 1960s, and in some ways, the group they formed in 1968 may be seen as a rejection of the stale, overblown spectacle of the state ensembles. (See Levin, 1996b: 45, on the "frozen music" of Soviet ensembles in Central Asia.) Dialing down the size of their choir, Rustavi focused on precision and blending in their singing, using their Western classical training to craft performances of haunting power and dynamic contrast. Their recordings for the Melodiya label, which helped spread the Rustavi sound, were skillfully engineered by Mikheil Kilosanidze and made great use of reverberant space and balance between soloists and chorus. In his liner notes to *Georgian Voices* (1989b), a compilation CD for Nonesuch Records, Theodore Levin sums up the approach: "The Rustavi's performance style synthesizes the powerful, rough-hewn sound characteristic of the traditional regional folk choirs with a newer, cleaner, more finely-honed aesthetic whose orientation is towards concert presentation—nowadays on an increasingly international scale."

¹⁵ Insightful ethnographies have been written on analogous state ensembles in Bulgaria (Rice, 1994; Buchanan, 1995, 2006), work to which I am deeply indebted.

Rustavi's techniques became known as the "academic" style, likely a reference to their conservatory training, and by the time of Levin's writing, it was already being challenged by a new generation of singers. In the early 1980s, a young scholar and singer named Edisher Garakanidze founded two ensembles, Mtiebi (a mixed-voice group) and Mzetamze (an all-female group). He and his colleagues were devoted to field research in villages and motivated by a desire to rediscover the original functions of folk songs, an approach that resembled the work of Dmitri Pokrovsky's influential Russian ensemble (Levin, 1996a). Also, part of this new revival movement was the Anchiskhati Church Choir, which made its name through careful research on the earliest sources of Georgian Orthodox chant and revived liturgical chanting as a daily practice in the oldest church in Tbilisi.

For these groups, the archival recordings beginning to be released by Anzor Erkomaishvili in the mid-1980s were incredibly valuable. In the waning years of the Soviet Union, the Gramophone Company discs especially held the key to restoring a pre-Soviet musical past. Among the salient features of the archival recordings were repertoire (songs lost or forgotten in the intervening years), tuning (evidence of an indigenous Georgian scale prior to western European influence), and, perhaps most importantly, vocal timbre.¹⁶ Groups like Anchiskhati developed a mode of vocal production that was bright, edgy, and individualized, the very "rough-hewn sound" (Levin, 1989) smoothed over by the blended choral textures of Rustavi.¹⁷ In terms of vocal timbre, then, Basiani's performance of "Sajavakhura naduri" in 2009 most closely resembles this post-Rustavi wave of practice.

This historical sketch should not, however, imply a simplistic narrative in which the academic style was completely replaced by a neotraditional or "village" style. Indeed, as John Graham (2015: 477) observes, when Georgian chant appears today on television—in historical documentaries or

¹⁶ Determining the precise intervallic structure of an "original" Georgian scale is one of the abiding questions in Georgian ethnomusicology, and it is pursued by scholars from Georgia (Erkvanidze, 2003; Tsereteli & Veshapidze, 2015) and elsewhere (Gelzer, 2003; Scherbaum, 2016; Müller et al., 2017). All of them, to greater or lesser degrees, rely on archival audio recordings as evidence for their theories.

¹⁷ To hear the difference in vocal production, compare renditions of the Georgian hymn "Shen khar venakhi" (Thou art a vineyard) by Rustavi. (https://youtu.be/RH9zNz9L_VA) and Anchiskhati (<https://youtu.be/JTJFX3bdMA0>).

fund-raising appeals by the Orthodox Patriarchate—it is still the hushed tones of Rustavi-style chorality that invariably greet the ear. Rather, I propose that recognizing the coexistence of these varying vocal practices provides crucial grounding for a media-archaeological analysis of the Gramophone Company recordings and their recirculation. Furthermore, close attention to embodied practices of the voice, especially elusive aspects like timbre, can disrupt the seemingly total authority of a dominant cultural figure like Anzor. Expanding on Roland Barthes's (1977) famous essay, Steven Feld and his coauthors assert, "The physical grain of the voice has a fundamentally social life" (2004: 341). Although popular performers like Anzor and the Rustavi Ensemble have the power to inscribe certain practices directly on the voice, the marks they leave are ephemeral, subject to the near-infinite pliability of the voice in its social aspect.

5. Mistakes and mimesis

The authority of an old phonogram record can be seen as a kind of "frozen media knowledge" that is "waiting to be unfrozen, liquefied" (Ernst, 2013: 60). In the case of the Gramophone Company recordings, the process of liquefying includes the efforts by folklore groups to re-create and perform songs directly based on recordings. This is another feature of the archive's archontic principle: because something is attested in the archive, it is viewed as legitimate. Its archival presence allows it to be referenced and brought back into living practice, with a powerful claim to authenticity. At times, however, the testimony of the recording is, perhaps, untrustworthy.

Thus we return to the concert with which we began, in which Anzor promised a performance of the "exact same variant" of "Sajavakhura naduri" as Gigo recorded in 1907. Carl Linich drew my attention to Basiani's performance because of something curious that happens in the first moments of singing. At the beginning of the 1907 recording, a solo voice, having just sung a circular, three-note motive, is joined for a brief moment by one or more other voices. After barely a second of overlap, the upper voices cut out, and the solo voice continues to the end of the phrase (musical example 1).¹⁸ Linich was convinced that this had been a mistake, that the brief clash of voices occurred because one or more singers jumped

¹⁸ <https://youtu.be/vS8T103n9-Y>. Levan Veshapidze (2006: 65) transcribes this opening moment somewhat differently, suggesting an intentional overlap.

in too early. In Basiani's 2009 performance, however, they reproduced the 1907 "mistake" precisely.

The musical score is written on a single staff in G-clef (treble clef) with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with a 'Solo:' marking. The melody consists of quarter notes: G4 (labeled 'wo'), A4 (labeled 'o'), B4 (labeled 'ho'), and C5 (labeled 'ho'). This is followed by a double bar line. Above the staff, 'Unidentified Voice(s):' is written, with three staves showing notes: G4 (labeled 'wo'), A4 (labeled 'wo'), and B4 (labeled 'o'). The main melody continues with a half note D5 (labeled 'wo') followed by a quarter rest. Then, an 'accel.' marking appears above the staff, followed by a sequence of eighth notes: E5 (labeled 'de'), F#5 (labeled 'la'), G5 (labeled 'da'), A5 (labeled 'wo'), B5 (labeled 'o'), and C6 (labeled 'ho'). The piece ends with a final quarter note D6 (labeled 'da').

Musical Example 1. Opening moments of “Sajavakhura Naduri,” recorded by Gigo Erkomaishvili’s group in 1907.

Linich’s claim that the 1907 singers made a mistake has evidence to support it. Most tellingly, Anzor’s group, Rustavi, performs the opening differently, with the first phrase immediately repeated by the second soloist before the first soloist continues (see musical example 2).¹⁹ In this, they are likely following the score published by Anzor himself (Erkomaishvili, 2005: 120), which is based, like all the scores in this collection, on transcriptions made by Anzor of the songs taught to him orally by his grandfather Artem. Artem, in turn, was a member of his father Gigo’s choir. All of this suggests a conception of “Sajavakhura naduri”—indeed, an authoritative conception, based on the genealogical authenticity of transmission through the Erkomaishvili family—in which the clash of voices does not occur.

But is “mistake” the right word? For Anzor and the members of Basiani, the answer is no. Zurab Tskrialashvili, a founding member and now director of Basiani, thought “misunderstanding” might be better. His tentative suggestion was that in 1907 Gigo’s group had decided to do a shorter opening of the song than usual—perhaps aware of the limited time available on the record—but that in the moment of recording, one of the singers began singing his usual part, forgetting the plan to shorten the opening (Zurab Tskrialashvili, Facebook messages, 8 July 2018). Not for a moment, however, did the members of Basiani consider “correcting” the opening or singing it any differently—they were committed to precise sonic fidelity to

¹⁹ Rustavi may be seen performing “Sajavakhura naduri” on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/Y4csjUVesdw>).